
Title: Mystery of Numbers

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The Mystery
of Numbers,
an Inquiry Into
Mathematics
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It is in common things,
not the weighty
considerations of scholarly
pursuits, that the origin
of mathematics are to be
found. The need to make
records for trade, for
understanding the
movements of the heavens
and the weather that
numbers and calculations
arose. But sometime
after those first clever
men created the numbers
system, a different breed
of men used the numbers
for purposes they were
not intended for. These
men were the first
mathemeticians, and they
took the numbers and
used them for their own
sake, performing for the
first time calculations
that had no reference to
the physical world--
instead of counting sheep
or debts, they were
counting pure number. And
in this exercise, the
mathemeticians noticed
certain patterns abounded,
and that in some sense
the numbers seemed to
live a life of their own,
following their own
system of rules and
relationships just as man
and society has his own
rules and society. But

these rules seem to us
as foreign and arbitrary
as the rules of some
lost, distant society
whose aims we can only
guess at. Why should the
hypotenuse of a right
triangle always equal the
root of the sum of the
squares of the other two
sides? It has been proven
thus, but there is no
sense in it, and the more
the scholar considers it,
the more he is
confronted with the
idea of the mystery of
numbers. For some
mathematicians, in love
with their work more
than with the rest of
the world as such, posit
that these odd rules of
the world of number can
yet have meaning to men,
and that their mysteries
offer us a higher form
of truth, if only we can
decode it. And so they
seek relationships between
the world physical and
the world mathematical,
hoping to somehow ferret
out the code key that
will allow them to
decipher the higher
meanings behind the
mathematical formulae
they work with. The
question I pose in this
work is thus: is there
any merit to the idea
that wisdom can be found
in the mystery of
numbers? Can we reap
any insights from this
peculiar sort of science?
Sadly, the answer to both
questions is no.

Mathematics is a
wonderful science, but it
is and must always be at
its heart a practical one,
practiced for the benefit
of mankind. Indeed, it is
through the proper
application of
mathematical principles

that we have made recent advances in architecture and astronomy, among other like achievements. But humankind as a race is too apt to elevate the practical to the level of the profound, and too likely to see patterns where none truly exist. One interesting thing about mathematics is that it contains no human assumptions other than the relationships of the numbers as we define them, i.e. that three preceeds four, which preceeds five, etc. Thus, all the mathematical relationships which the learned men study descend simply from the tautological relationships as defined. Like a great knot of string, all of mathematics can be distilled back to its essential relationships, where $1 + 1 = 2$. But no matter how complex a knot may be, it is still nothing more than a string, and though we may marvel at the complexities of the knot, or its aesthetic characteristics, it would be foolish to assign to it any higher meanings, simply because its true nature is not immediately apparent. Likewise with mathematics, let us be amazed by the intricacies of its strange ways, but let us use them to elevate mankind and serve the Virtues, rather than worshipping them like some awestruck peasant.